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June 10, 2022

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Cartwright and Shaheen and Ranking Members Aderholt and Moran,

With the strong endorsement of the ASA Forensic Science Committee, I write in support of funding the National Institute of Justice at $60 million in fiscal year 2023. The NIJ is the largest US federal funder of research in the forensic sciences. Because of its research support, the research community has gained a better understanding of the accuracy associated with traditional forensic examination approaches, developed algorithmic and software tools to assist examiners by providing quantitative support for their conclusions, and provided databases as resources for the forensic community. Research contributions like these are needed to reduce errors by improving the forensic tools available to the criminal justice system.

The 2009 National Academies of Sciences report, "Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward,"[1] highlighted gaps in various forensic science disciplines. Progress has been made in the last 13 years with NIJ support. For example, the NIJ has supported several

[1] https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/12589/strengthening-forensic-science-in-the-united-states-a-path-forward

high-impact reliability studies of examiners in fingerprints, firearms, handwriting, bloodstain pattern, and tire treads. It has also supported the development of large-scale databases in fire debris, reference lubricants, smokeless powders, and glass. However, there is much work yet to be done, and the NIJ is has the experience and expertise for selecting projects and funding this research.

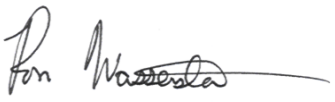
In its 2015 report, "Support for Forensic Science Research: Improving the Scientific Role of the National Institute of Justice,"[2] a National Academies' panel reviewed the progress made by the NIJ to advance forensic science research since the 2009 report. The report stated that NIJ had increased transparency in how funding is allocated and applications are peer-reviewed, expanded dissemination to the practice and research communities, added new investigators, and increased partnerships with other agencies.

Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, NIJ has had to steadily cut back funding of forensic science over the last several years. Since peak funding in FY15 of nearly $30 million for forensic science research and development, funding fell to approximately $14 million in FY21. The decline in funding for forensic science research will likely continue with the 19 percent cut to NIJ's budget, from $37 million in FY21 to $30 million in FY22.

To continue building the scientific foundations for forensic science, researchers need to better understand the accuracy of a variety of pattern and impression disciplines, they need new technology to analyze smaller amounts of evidence found at crime scenes, and they need to develop new algorithms that can improve forensic decision-making. Numerous researchers who have ideas and are working with practitioners are ready to do this research, but the work can only be done with appropriate research funding.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ron Wasserstein
ASA Executive Director

[2] https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/21772/support-for-forensic-science-research-improving-the-scientific-role-of